

THE
PRAISE OF WOMEN :

IN
A N S W E R

TO
THIS QUESTION,

*Whether the Company of WOMEN be useful
or hurtful to YOUNG MEN at their first
Setting out in the World?*

BY MR. S. M.

—O Woman!—Lovely Woman!—
Nature made you to temper Man!
We had been Brutes without you;
Angels are painted fair to look like you,
There's in you, all that we believe of Heaven,
Amazing Brightness, Purity, and Truth,
Eternal Joy, and everlasting Love. OTWAY.

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THE
PRAISE OF WOMEN.

A
DIALOGUE

BETWEEN

PHILANDER and URBANUS.

URBANUS.
THAT the inclination which *Men* have for *Women*, and *Women* mutually for *Men*, was planted in them by the wise Author of Nature is indisputable ; who having determined to continue and multiply mankind by their concurrence, bestowed beauty and allurements on the *Woman* to invite the inclinations of *Man*, and a comeliness on *Man*, to engage *Woman* to forget her self-love, and receive his addresses with complacency.

Philander. Whence then can proceed that savage aversion some *Men* bear to *Women*, the difficulties they find in themselves to accost them, and their confusion when they are obliged to be in company with them ?

Urb. I impute it to this ; They have passed their days far from *Women*, and whenever decency or duty calls them into their company, they are stupid with confusion ; it is to them a *Terra incognita* ; the behaviour, the discourse, every thing they see and hear is new to them, and quite different to what they see and hear at the University ; and even the things they know are treated of in so genteel a manner, that they have all the difficulty in the world to put in a word ; young Gentlemen despairing of acquiring this politeness and vivacity, conceive a distaste against the company of *Women*, and so shaking off the constraints they are under, run where they may be more at liberty.

Phil. There is a great deal of truth in what you say : but what a terrible consequence attends this bashfulness ? How often do these too timorous Sparks fall into the hands of debauchees, who railing against the folly, the ingratitude, and inconstancy of Women, and exaggerating the vexatious ceremonies of their company, confirm them in their distaste ? They propose merry-makings, and their converts are extremely well pleased to find themselves in company where they enjoy an uncontrouled freedom, and where vice and extravagancy are extolled as the genuine qualities of a fine Gentleman. By this licentiousness, vice becomes a habit, and they grow old in riot and debauchery.

Urb. Your reasoning is so just, that I am convinced the company of *modest Women* is a strong barrier against vice, and implants virtuous principles into the minds of Youth. The frequenting of it causes an aversion to, and contempt of the loose part of the sex. How exquisitely delightful is the conversation of a beautiful, ingenious Woman ! She says a thousand pretty things, and in words that seem invented to express her sentiments. The desire of being agreeable to a lady of this character, is sufficient to create virtue, at least to make us very careful to conceal our vices or frailties, and shew ourselves in the fairest light.

Phil. If you were careless in your behaviour, you would not go unpunished. An ingenious *Woman* will never fail to satirize without mercy, those indiscreet *young Gentlemen* who proclaim their follies, and boast of their intrigues, feasts, and disorderly revellings. Such reproaches wound deeply, because they cannot be returned with equal delicacy of wit ; moreover, a pert Spark who laughs at sacred things, will listen to a woman, and is rallied into a love and practice of virtue ; another, and that no small advantage, which accrues to us from the company of Women, whose rank and qualifications claim a respect, is this, We must not presume to give the tongue an indecent liberty, our discourse must be mild, elegant and chaste ; no oaths nor obscene words
must

must offend their ears. This sort of talk, though so brutish, through the licentiousness of the age, is become very common among men who are equals.

Urb. Though you maintain that the conversation of Women is so very advantageous, you cannot deny but that it is inconvenient, and even dangerous, and that a great deal of circumspection is required to keep yourself on your legs, for, as the Poet sings,

Beauty like ice our footing does betray,
Who can tread sure on the smooth slipp'ry way ?
Pleas'd with the passage we slide swiftly on,
And see the dangers which we cannot shun.

What false steps, what enormities have not *Men* been guilty of through a blind obedience to a *Woman's* will ! How many unfortunate wretches could I name, whose flourishing conditions have been blasted by *Women* ? The Monarch's crown has fallen from his head ; the Hero's laurels have faded ; glorious cities have been laid in ashes ; the world has often been a scene of blood, and all these miseries have sprung from *Womau*. Every one has not an empire to lose with *Mark Anthony*, for it is certain that his ruin was effected by his favourite *Cleopatra*.

Phil. I am of your opinion that the company of Women is very dangerous to one who cannot restrain his appetites within the limits of reason and virtue, but overlooking all the terrible consequences, with eagerness and pleasure, submits himself implicitly, and complies with every whimsical freak. We must fortify our minds so, as to be able to converse with Women, without being slaves to their vanity. The instances you mention shew there are men of weak faculties, in whose breasts the passion of love reigns with uncontrouled violence. The fate of *Mark Anthony* was entirely owing to his own indiscretion, *Cleopatra* was not to be blamed. *Julius Caesar* was passionately enamoured with the same Queen, nevertheless he gained his point, and made himself

master of the *Roman* empire. His love did not extinguish all other views, nor lessen his courage, vigilance, and capacity, but with the same artful, resolute spirit, he made his parties in the *Senate*, he commenced and carried on his intrigues with the *Roman Ladies*.

Urb. At least you must grant, that the time we bestow on the company of Women is very idly thrown away; and it is a rock which a man who is devoted to study ought carefully to avoid: for he will not only miss the improvement he expects, but his happy inclinations will be perverted, and he will find himself wholly given up to the weakness of childish love and gaiety.

Phil. How not get *any* improvement! If you talk of a Pedant who crams his brain with *Greek* and *Latin* sentences, metaphysical distinctions, and a logical jargon only to confound the ignorant, I readily agree with you. But a Man whose good sense leads him to embellish his mind with genteel studies, will make a greater proficiency therein by frequenting the company of ingenious, polite Women, than by poring over all the books that were ever printed. He will acquire a fluent diction, and a graceful manner of expression, without which, knowledge is despicable, or at least loses very much of its worth and beauty; for what does it avail to have the memory loaded with an undigested heap of notions, if they are irregularly and inelegantly displayed? The discourse of a learned Man is insipid without these talents, and he who totally sequesters himself from the company of Women, will never attain them. The style, gesture, air, delivery, and other graces of conversation, are not to be acquired in a library. To speak pertinently and politely, to praise what another blames, and to blame what another praises, without seeming fractious or positive, and to discern true literature from pedantry, I say these qualifications are better learned over a tea-table, than at a University. Women surpass Men in the judgment of fine thoughts and suitable expressions; their taste is more delicate, and for the art pleasing, which every one who would endear himself to mankind

mankind ought to be versed in, we must attend to their instructions, and imitate their behaviour. The respect which we pay to the fair sex civilizes the soul, and gives a habit of complacence. Men are free with one another, and talk without ceremony or reserve. When they are about business, or defending their private opinions, they grow angry, and make use of oaths and harsh words, which they dare not before Women, for the respect paid to them controuls anger and obstinacy, accustoms us to yield, and instils a gentleness of temper, which is the most amiable branch of politeness.

Urb. There is indeed in the soul of Man, a natural desire to be in the good graces of Women of sense and beauty. This desire engrosses all our care, and sets our wits at work; we try every method to succeed, assume so many different shapes, and vary our behaviour so often, that at length we compass what we so ardently wished for. The elegance and perspicuity of their style, together with the musical sweetness of their voice, render the conversation of Women extremely agreeable and improving. The pretty terms they make use of to express themselves, make even trifles seem elegant. They are the sovereign umpires of words, in their assemblies many new phrases are introduced, and by their authority are either out-lawed or admitted.

Phil. What you have said entirely overthrows that ill-mannered prejudice which keeps Men of learning and virtue from the company of Women, as being the greatest impediment to their designs, and the school of ignorance and vice. The better to illustrate this, let us compare two men of equal and eminent learning, one whereof has confined himself wholly to his library, and is only acquainted with books. The other, who with his studies has mixed the conversation of polite persons, which never fails to eradicate from the mind the clownishness, obstinacy, and moroseness of the Schools. A Man who has seen Women only as it were in perspective, if he be but an ordinary genius, seems stupid when he is obliged to converse with them, his bashfulness disturbs

his thoughts, and ties up his tongue ; in his looks, gesture, and every part of his behaviour, he is the very picture of an idiot, and though he were otherwise a Man really of excellent endowments, yet being a novice in this scene of life, and unacquainted with the humours, laws, and customs of the *Female World*, will appear, as we say, but a mere *hum-drum*. If learning be his chief talent, he is only a pedant ; when he speaks, it is with so much confusion, that he seems a stranger in his own country ; and if he understand to shew his good breeding by compliments, nothing can be more starched and insipid, nay, very often he says the reverse of what he intended. If the discourse be on topics which he never read of in his books, though they require no great depth of understanding, he is instantly struck silent, and dares not join in a conversation where the persons of but indifferent learning, by their knowledge of the world, shall make a very agreeable figure ; nor can his lumpish mass relish the wit and sprightly turns of the rest of the company.

Urb. But then he severely revenges himself, if you start a subject which comes within the sphere of his knowledge. What an inundation of pedantry follows ! He runs over all the *Greek* and *Roman* Authors, is bewildered even in his own thoughts, and grows unintelligible both to his auditors and to himself. He disputes, and pragmatically asserts the contrary to what another says, purely to shew his learning and sophistry. If he be plied with arguments which put him to a stand, like a mere scholar, he has recourse to fowl language, and every body that differs from him is a fool and an *ignoramus*. This impertinent way of shewing his parts, renders him more disagreeable than his awkward silence, though the poor vain creature thinks it gains him admiration. It is the characteristic of Fellows of Colleges, Students, or Scholars of what degree and age soever, whose University rust has not been filed off, till they have received the polishing of a converse among the Ladies, and are let into the secrets of the *Beau-Monde* ; till this lucky era they

they can neither speak nor be silent with discretion ; they are a medley of self-conceit, sheepishness, pedantry and obstinacy ; their whole behaviour shews them to be a herd of clownish blunderbuffes : but polite scholars, who after they have finished the course of their studies, frequent the assemblies, soon acquire a genteel deportment. Their countenance cheers up, their looks are gay and serene, and their carriage graceful and engaging. When they speak, it is with ease and elegance. They unfold the most abstruse and intricate subject in a manner so clear and conspicuous, that even nature herself seems to speak with their tongue. Nay, there is something ingenious in the *silence* of a *polite scholar* ; he listens with an air that tells us he is master of the discourse, and his wit and penetration are plainly to be discovered in his very countenance and attention.

Phil. But among their many other defects, what is most offensive to me, in those who are *scholars* by *profession*, and which makes me shun them as unsociable creatures, is their violent fondness of their own notions, together with their bitter hatred and insolent contempt of those who in the least differ from them. Nor have they any respect to persons, but load their antagonist with the most opprobrious names, and pronounce sentence of damnation against them promiscuously. Yet, these very Men, when they have acquired any knowledge of the world, soon become tractable, and improve upon all accounts. Their narrow uncharitable way of thinking is enlarged, they will not positively affirm that a Man for being mistaken in this world, shall be damned in the next. They begin to alledge reasons in defence of their sentiments with deference to the rest of the company, and when they prosecute any argument, it is rather to keep up an instructive conversation, than out of a spirit of contradiction. Their behaviour is so decent and graceful, that they gain the applause and esteem of all, even of those who are of contrary principles.

Urb. I know partly by experience, that such agreeable qualifications are only to be acquired in the company
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of polite persons, more particularly ingenious Women, by whom we are taught how to speak, and when to be silent. For though the learning of the Ladies be, generally, not very deep, yet their taste is exquisitely delicate. Whatever is easy, natural, witty, and judicious pleases them, and they immediately shew a disgust for whatever is obscure, unnatural, insipid, or impertinent.

Phil. What answer can you make to the common objection against these polite Female-assemblies? *That they effeminate the mind, depriving it of its natural courage and resolution?*

Urb. This objection is certainly the most ill grounded that ever was raised; for the Ladies have a natural aversion to cowards, and men of pusillanimous spirits. Though a man be endowed with every virtue and amiable quality, let him be learned, wise, courteous, generous and just, if he be not brave, all his excellencies will be overlooked, and he will never be esteemed by a Woman of merit. As courage is a virtue, which, perhaps, for the better æconomy of the world, nature has not bellowed on them, and which does not belong to their tender frame, they endeavour to make all possible amends by their extreme love and admiration of that person who possesses it in an eminent degree. The praise of a Woman of worth quickens the courage of a Man of true honor. Incited by a thirst of glory, and an ardent desire of rivetting himself in the esteem of the Lady for whom he entertains an affectionate passion, no dangers can deter him, no attempt is too difficult, his exploits will appear prodigies. This desire of pleasing is attended with another very good effect, it purifies the courage of a soldier from its dross of cruelty; for the many severe hostilities, slaughters and devastations committed in war, will harden the mind, and produce wild and inhuman inclinations, unless, after the tumults and horrors of a campaign are over, he frequents the assemblies of Ladies; he will there forget his martial ferocity, and imbibe piety, gentleness, and other tender virtues which are not in the least inconsistent with courage, but add a
great

great beauty to it. A PRINCESS of the last age, renowned for her learning, wit, and good sense, used to say, *I have but a small esteem for a mere man of courage, for his company is dangerous and troublesome, and his discourse vulgar and profane. Such men should reserve their swords for the enemies of their country, and not draw them for every trifle upon a fellow-citizen.* It is a common weakness in *Military Gentlemen*, to be always talking of battles, storms, and sieges, wherein themselves have acted a considerable part. When they talk of War, let it be with modesty and discretion; they must not draw up an army in battle array, nor give a particular account of every Regiment and Squadron that engaged; but above all, let them conceal their own exploits, at least not attribute to themselves Actions which they had never courage enough to perform, for this vain boasting lessens Men in the opinion of the world, and ruins that reputation which it was invented to raise. The *Assemblies of Ladies* are like so many schools of virtue and politeness, wherein the *Gentlemen* of the army may learn many things which cannot be attained in the camp.—From what has been said on this subject, I think, dear *Philander*, we may surely conclude, that the company of virtuous, polite, ingenious *Women* is so very far from being prejudicial to *Young Men*, that it is highly beneficial to them. It restrains them from riot and debauchery, polishes their faculties, inspires both good manners and good morals, and eradicates out of the mind every enormous vice, takes away moroseness and obstinacy from learning, and cruelty and brutality from courage. For as the Poet justly sings,

In vain are musty morals taught in schools,
By rigid teachers, and as rigid rules,
Where virtue with a frowning aspect stands,
And frights the pupil from its rough commands.
But charming Woman can true converts make,
We love the precepts for the teacher's sake.
Virtue in them appears so bright, so gay,
We hear with transport, and with pride obey.

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As for those wretched creatures who have cast away the robe of chastity, and are the shame of their own sex, and often the destruction of ours, I recommend to all young Men the advice of *Acasto* to his Sons in the *Orphan*.

Beware the dangerous beauty of the wanton,
 Shun their enticements. Ruin like a Vulture
 Waits on their conquests. Falshood too's their business.
 They put false beauty of to all the world,
 Use false endearments to the fools that love them.
 And when they marry, to their silly Husbands
 They bring false Virtue, broken Fame, and Fortune.

F I N I S.

